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ABSTRACT

This document proposes a case study approach to U.S. history instruction. The method which the document suggests arises from an actual class discussion of the My Lai massacre that occurred during the Vietnam War. A sample class discussion concerns the setting of standards to guide national and international affairs and the particular standards that the United States applied in fighting the War in Southeast Asia. The document's main section entitled "Immediate and Long-Term Teaching Options" presents three approaches to such a case study approach: (1) "Choices in the Heat of Discussion"; (2) "Possibilities for Follow Up"; and (3) "Additional Questions and Issues." (SG)

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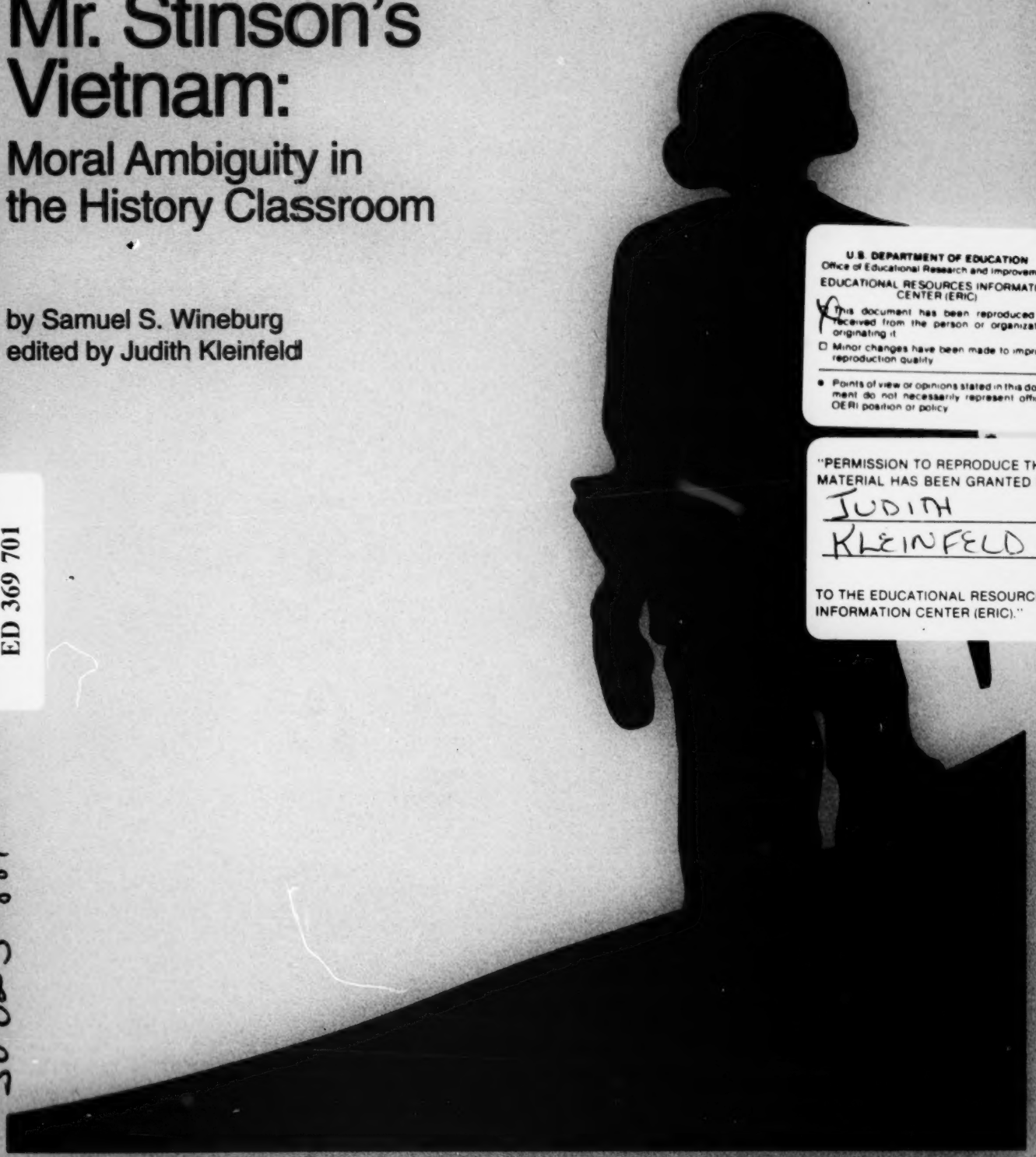
Mr. Stinson's Vietnam:

Moral Ambiguity in the History Classroom

by Samuel S. Wineburg
edited by Judith Kleinfeld



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Mr. Stinson's Vietnam

Moral Ambiguity in the History Classroom

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Introduction

Mr. Stinson's Vietnam: Moral Ambiguity in the History Classroom focuses on a classic problem: How should a teacher handle a controversial topic where the students hold beliefs, developed in their families, that the teacher considers fundamentally wrong? Many teachers believe that challenging students' beliefs is essential to education. But such challenges on emotionally charged issues can undermine the family's cultural and moral authority and pit the family against the teacher.

This particular classroom dilemma centers on the morality of American soldiers' shooting My Lai villagers during the Vietnam War. Mr. Stinson, the history teacher, is shocked to find that his high school students, many of whom had fathers who fought in the Vietnam War, actually believe that the My Lai shooting was justified. Even Cindy, a student who can usually be counted upon to give what Mr. Stinson believes to be the moral and compassionate response, defends the American soldiers. "When you make a commitment to do something," she insists, "you're going to do things you don't like."

The case raises crucial questions about a teacher's responsibilities in dealing with controversial topics. Should the teacher try to avoid emotionally charged topics on which students' parents and the teacher hold opposed views? Should the teacher present various sides of the issue without taking a stand? Is neutrality the moral response?

Mr. Stinson's Vietnam not only presents the classroom situation and how Mr. Stinson handled it. In addition, the case offers hypothetical ways Mr. Stinson could have dealt with this situation for students to evaluate. Part II of this case considers the alternatives Mr. Stinson had immediately, within the heat of the discussion and later on, when he had had an opportunity to reflect on

what happened and consider follow-up activities. Mr. Stinson wanted to develop the concept of natural law, the idea of a higher moral authority, and point out the constitutional grounding of this idea. Should Mr. Stinson have side-stepped the debate on Vietnam, which would inevitably be personalized due to the students' fathers experience, in order to develop these concepts later in the course in a less charged context? Should he have answered directly the students who believed that the killings at My Lai were justifiable and should he have answered the students in his own voice or in the voice of a hypothetical "alternative viewpoint"?

How should Mr. Stinson respond to these issues after the immediate confrontation has passed? He could, for example, do a role playing exercise where students play the parts of My Lai villagers. He could invite a parent to discuss the situation, such as Donnie's father, who had lost a limb to a land mine near Da Nang. He could invite a Vietnamese refugee who could speak about American atrocities. Are any of these follow-up activities appropriate and on what grounds?

Development of the Case

Mr. Stinson's Vietnam is based on an authentic teaching situation with the names and identifying details changed to protect confidentiality. The classroom dialogue was recorded during an actual classroom discussion in "Mr. Richard Stinson's" history classroom.

Mr. Stinson was observed as part of the Wisdom of Practice research of the Teacher Assessment Project, directed by Lee S. Shulman of Stanford Univesity. The editor of this series, Judith Kleinfeld of the University of Alaska, asked Samuel Wineburg of the University of Washington to turn this classroom situation into a "teaching case," which presents classic teaching dilemmas.

The dilemma in *Mr. Stinson's Vietnam* centers on the teaching of history, but it raises basic questions about clashes in cultural values between the teacher and the culture of the school and the students and the culture of a local community. The case makes the point that such cultural discontinuities also occur in classrooms where the teacher and students come from similar ethnic backgrounds but nonetheless differ profoundly in their fundamental world-views.

Every teacher's experience is individual and unique. We make no claim that the situation described is representative of history teaching in any statistical sense. We offer this case as a concrete and dramatic example of a crucial teaching issue. Experienced teachers find these situations troubling and believe that prospective teachers will benefit from reflecting on them.

Purposes of Teaching Cases

Teaching cases have long been a cornerstone of professional preparation in schools of law, business, and medicine. Teacher educators have begun to explore their value in the preparation of teachers (Doyle, 1990; Merseth, 1991; Shulman & Colbert, 1989).

Cases offer rich, dramatic accounts of the problems teachers actually confront in the classroom. McRobbie and Shulman (1991) draw attention to the advantages of cases in capturing the complexity of teaching:

> Cognitive psychologists like Rand Spiro and his colleagues at the University of Illinois point out that principles alone tend to confirm the novice's already oversimplified notion of what teaching is all about. Cases, by contrast, illustrate how complex teaching really is, thereby better preparing newcomers for an "ill-structured domain" where there are few clear right or wrong courses of action. Advocates of case methods hope that with practice in analyzing a variety of cases, individually and in groups, students will learn to think like professionals. (p. 1)

Cases increase teachers' abilities to:

- identify the issues in a troubling situation and frame these problems in productive ways;
- understand the complexity of professional problems and how ethical, interpersonal, and policy issues may be implicit in what appear to be merely routine classroom decisions;
- apply theoretical concepts and research findings to concrete situations; and
- identify a number of possible strategies for handling situations.

A good case, like a good story, also gives pleasure. Students typically enjoy reading cases and thinking about these human dramas.

Each case tells an unfolding story. Some people prefer to read the case like a short story. But a person teaching the case may want to stop the story at critical points so that students can think about the issues. The case leader may want to ask such questions as: What problems does this teacher face? What options for action does she have? Can you spin out the consequences of the approach you are proposing? What do you see as the risks?

Studying and Teaching a Case

Mr. Stinson's Vietnam presents the situation in Mr. Stinson's classroom and follows this narrative with three sets of questions:

1. Part 1: Choices in the Heat of Discussion
2. Part 2: Possibilities for Following Up This Discussion
3. Part 3: Additional Questions and Issues for Discussion

The case leader may wish to give students the classroom narrative alone and ask the students themselves to determine what fundamental issues the situation presents and how the teacher might respond.

In reading and teaching a case, it is helpful to keep in mind the following general kinds of questions. Most have been culled from the instructor's guide to ***Teaching and the Case Method*** (Christensen, Hansen, & Moore, 1987) and from discussions about case method teaching (Christensen & Hansen, 1987).

These questions are:

1. What are the central issues in this situation? Which are the most urgent?
2. What, if anything, should anyone do? Why do you think so?
3. How would you evaluate what the teacher did up to this point? What other options does the teacher have?
4. How do you think this situation would appear to others in the case—the students, parents, or principal?
5. What, if anything, have you learned from the case?

To encourage the students to think carefully about the issues, we often ask students to read the case before class and write a 1–2 page paper analyzing the case and recommending a course of action.

To help students consolidate what they have learned from the class discussion of the case, we often ask them to write a reflective paper on the case after the classroom discussion. We hope to see in students' thinking a more complex and nuanced analysis of the issues and a better thought out strategy for dealing with them.

Mr. Stinson's Vietnam differs from many other teaching cases in offering to students not only the classroom situation itself but alternative worlds—different ways the teacher could have responded. Inexperienced teachers particularly may not raise on their own these hypothetical teaching moves nor be able to articulate the rationale for them. The case leader may find it valuable to give students the second section of the case before the discussion in order to increase the complexity of the students' thinking.

Case discussions usually develop richer ideas if students can talk with each other and not direct comments to the teacher alone. Arranging student chairs in a semi-circle or using a classroom with swivel seats encourages dialogue between students.

The case leader can also suggest that students direct their comments to the last speaker, raise questions for each other to answer, comment on each other's responses, and take responsibility as a group for analyzing the case.

While student dialogue is desirable, the case leader also can take an active role in presenting information and summarizing the discussion. Some case leaders summarize the issues of the case and the insights that have come up. Others ask students what they have learned from the case. Students usually appreciate a structured closure to a case discussion which gives them a conceptual framework with which to consider similar issues they may face as teachers.

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The Confrontation

Nothing in Richard Stinson's 17-year teaching career prepared him for class that Wednesday morning—certainly not the two previous lessons in the sequence, which had gone pretty much as planned. This lesson, the third in the opening unit on the formation of American government, was usually the most straightforward of the three. As in the past, Stinson planned to discuss yesterday's activity, a game conceived by his 11th-graders two days before and played by them yesterday. He would help students think about the parallels between this game—especially the power struggles and compromises that characterized it—and similar forces at work in American society. He would also help them think about an essay due at the end of the week on the question, "What are the parallels between the game our class created and people living together in U.S. society?"

He had taught this unit many times before and found that even when it "bombed," it worked. Although he had seen many changes during his years in Garden Ridge, watching it turn from a stable bedroom community of white, middle-class families to an ethnically diverse community in which renters outnumbered homeowners, this assignment remained a constant in his U.S. history curriculum. He knew from past experience that it provided students with a powerful metaphor for understanding the turbulence of the "Critical Period," that tense and uncertain time between the colonists' victory at Yorktown and the drafting of the Constitution in Philadelphia.

Stinson's plan for this Wednesday was to ask students to review yesterday's class, easily the most unusual of the school year. When they came to class on Tuesday, students placed their books on their desks, put on their jackets, and went outside to the school tennis courts. There, he gave each side an unusual

bag of equipment—two badminton racquets, a Frisbee, a Nerfball and several pingpong balls along with chalk and a blackboard—and repeated the only rule they had to abide by: They could do anything they wanted with this equipment so long as they found some way to use every piece of it.

What happened during this class period was what had happened many times before: a group of highly energetic adolescents thrilled about abandoning the classroom burst on to the tennis court ready to play their game. They quickly reviewed the rules from the previous day and began. But before long, they found these rules insufficient and started making adjustments. It turned out most students were left without racquets or balls, and stood aimlessly on the sidelines watching their peers have all the fun. These students started negotiating with the more active players, suggesting special adaptations and introducing new rules, all in an attempt to find a way for more people to be involved.

Standing over six feet tall, Stinson assumed a commanding presence on the sidelines, but he did little except to remind students of the rules they had formulated the previous day. He became directive only in the last two minutes of the hour when he told students to "think hard about what this game means because you'll have an essay due on Friday." But Stinson knew that he had to do more than that to prepare students for this essay. Left to their own devices, students would have a hard time connecting the concrete experience of the game with the abstract events of the American Revolution. So for the following day he scheduled a class period to debrief this experience, a time when he could help students see the parallels between the compromises they made and those made by the founders of the United States.

Class began on Wednesday with a brief discussion of current events. Stinson directed students' attention to a newspaper article taped to the board, "Poll Indicates Reagan's Approval Rating Down 15 Points." "Yo, he is still my main man," said Donnie, tall and ungainly and sporting a black Mac Truck cap. Other students joined in to support President Reagan, despite the controversy of the fast-breaking Iran/Contra scandal. Many of the more vocal students were wearing caps with logos like Allied VanLines and United Cargo, the freight companies that employed their parents. Others wore military jackets with names like Subic Bay and Okinawa embroidered on the back. In this environment, at least, President Reagan went unscathed by the day's news.

Students quieted down as Stinson moved to the center of the class to begin the day's lesson: "For your essay due on Friday, I want you to think about the parallels you see between your playing a game and people living in American society today. A couple of people said before class that they were having trouble seeing connections. I hope that possibly, as we discuss this, we can get a few ideas going." Stinson then went to the board and divided it into two sections: "The Game" and "U.S.A." "Okay, James," he began, "any parallels?" James, a small boy with neatly arranged notebooks on his desk, seemed puzzled. Hesitating, he said with some reluctance, "Well . . . we had to change the rules."

"Exactly, we changed the rules, especially in how we scored. Can you think of any basic rules or laws in American society that have been changed?" James looked stumped, as did the rest of the class. This was no surprise to Stinson. He knew that it would take time for students to come to understand that America's system of laws was created through debate and compromise, an insight absolutely essential to students' understanding of the formation of American government. While some students may have sensed the connection between the game and American legislative process, Stinson wanted these connections to be crystal clear.

"Well," he continued, "if we have changed the rules of the game then the parallel is that we've made alterations or changes in the way we live in America, no?" This prompt gave students the structure they needed. Immediately Ellen suggested, "yeh, like the Depression and all those social programs." John added, "And what about all those constitutional amendments." Stinson pressed him to be more specific. "Like not being able to drink." "Yes," Stinson nodded, "Good!"

The discussion started to take off, and Stinson, now smiling and animated, darted from the center of the classroom to the side and back to the board. When Nicole commented that the game was "all confused," Stinson used her response to explain how the period they were about to study, from the end of the Revolutionary War to the drafting of the Constitution, was known as the "Critical Period," a time marked by confusion, indecision, inaction, and growing discontent—the very aspects that characterized Tuesday's game. When Stacy observed that not everyone participated equally in playing the game, or even in making the rules,

Stinson pushed her to make the connection to U.S. society. "Well, in society some people vote and some don't, but even if you don't vote you're still going to have to abide by those rules." Before long the discussion was running by itself, the dream of every teacher. When one student suggested a feature of the game, another generated its analogue in American society. As students assumed more responsibility for the discussion, Stinson moved to the background. He listened hard to students' comments and quietly filled in the chart on the blackboard.

The way it all began was innocent enough, and no one could have predicted that this comment would lead where it did. Donnie's question would set off a chain of events that would challenge Richard Stinson's ability to manage the intellectual and moral climate of his classroom like few other challenges in his 17 years of teaching.

"Mr. S.," Donnie began, "You were watching over us in the game, kind of like the government or something, and when we made up a rule you had your little say in it too."

"I only set the parameters of the game, Donnie. What would be the parallel? What agency or institution in American sets the parameters on us?"

"You mean like the Supreme Court?" Donnie asked.

"Well," Stinson crunched up his forehead, "Would the chief justice say that he puts parameters around us?"

Donnie seemed to be following Stinson's lead. "Okay," Donnie paused to gather his thoughts, "let's say that you were the equivalent of the Supreme Court or say the Constitution, and then there was somebody, like the principal, watching over us, taking notes. Would that be a higher form of government?"

Stinson's satisfaction was written all over his face. Again he seized the opportunity to make Donnie and the rest of the class think harder: "Is there any government, or legal force in the world today that can tell the U.S. what to do?"

Some students answered "no way!" A few others laughed at the thought.

"You may laugh," Stinson said, moving from the side of the class to the front, "but did you know that the World Court, which is an agency of the United Nations, has felt that the U.S. has operated

in violation of international law in Nicaragua? By mining its harbors and taking overt military action, we have been found in violation of international law. But the question I'm aiming at is this: Is there any authority that transcends the constitution?"

Students looked puzzled.

"Well," Stinson continued, "What about moral authority or religious authority?

The mere mention of religion set off a flurry of "oohs" and "ahs," the students' signal that a taboo topic had been broached. Paul, sitting in the front row, seemed to initiate a script that had been played many times before. "So, Mr. S., are you saying there is a God?"

Stinson hesitated. "Come on Mr. S.," students chided, but Stinson, seeming to enact his part in this script, refused to take the bait.

"Okay, let me ask you this, Donnie: What was the defense at Nurenberg of the Nazi officials in the dock?"

"Obeying a higher up," Cindy piped in.

"Yes, Cindy, they were following orders from their superiors and they weren't in a position to disobey because they were being told what to do. Did that defence get them off the . . ."

Before Stinson could finish, Chris interrupted, "You know, Mr. S., 32 Nazis were acquitted."

Yes, Stinson did know. He also knew that Chris would know, since Chris, Donnie, and Dave, the three members of the Wednesday after school "War Club," knew practically every detail of W.W. II, from the number of casualties at Midway to the extent of damage in the firebombing of Dresden. But the comment left Stinson unfazed.

"Did it get Herman Goering off the hook? Albert Speer off the hook? More important, *should* it have gotten them off the hook?"

The question ignited a minor explosion in the class, a cacophony of "yesses," "no ways," and "of courses." Students were engaged and passionate, arguing as much with each other as responding to Stinson's query. Stinson pressed on with this topic because it was important for students to understand that Americans have always assumed that a larger moral force buttressed their legal

system. Through a series of questions, he hoped to get students to see what they already intuited.

"Say there was incontrovertible evidence that I had been involved in the extermination of innocent people," Stinson continued. "I didn't like it but I had been given orders to do it. Let me ask you," he said, his voice rising to a crescendo, "Would you do it?"

Donnie was the first to answer. "Well, let me ask you, Mr. S. What would happen if you refused orders?"

"I would be punished, I would be . . ."

But before he could finish, Tim broke in: "You probably would have gotten shot and thrown in a pit!"

"So," Stinson paused, his 6-foot-2-inch frame hovering above Tim's slight build, "Does that mean I'm *justified* in doing it?"

Again the class erupted into an intellectual free-for-all, with nos and yesses, charges and countercharges flying everywhere. Above it all, Chris made himself heard: "Tell me, what is more important: self-survival or survival of the masses you don't really care about anyway?

"You tell me, Chris," Stinson replied, staring squarely at him, waiting for an answer. For a moment, the atmosphere turned tense and silent, but Chris did not back down: "I'd save my own skin."

At that moment, the game, the chart, and even the essay students had to write were distant events in Stinson's mind. To leave such attitudes unchallenged would have violated everything Stinson believed about teaching. Didn't students have a unit on the Holocaust in 10th grade? Did it have no impact on them? Didn't they realize the implications of what they were saying?

All eyes were on Stinson, who for the first time in the class period looked rattled.

"Okay, let's see," he said, "so . . . if I understand you, Chris, you're saying I'm justified in killing innocent people. Does having orders get me off the hook? What do you think, Cindy?" Cindy, one of the most articulate students in the class, had been curiously silent during this discussion, and calling on her was a calculated guess that she would help turn the tide. "I think that it

just means," Cindy stated forcefully, "that you are participating in the illegal acts your superiors are doing."

Thank goodness, Stinson thought to himself, *a small dose of reason in this moral quagmire*. This comment, he hoped, would put the discussion back on track and help him get back to his point about a higher law that transcends laws enacted by human beings. All he had to do was to make this point explicit. "So," he said building on Cindy's comment, "If you are going to disobey the governmental structure above you, then what law or principles are you following?" Surely this more directed question would help students see the point behind the question that started this all. But not today. Debby responded, "You're not—you're not obeying any principle or law!"

Stinson's eyes darted to the clock. Fifteen minutes left in the hour. He had to bring this discussion to close, to return to the essays due on Friday. Yet how could he leave these issues out in the open, exposed and not dealt with? Again, before Stinson could catch his breath, Donnie responded to Debby's claim.

"Yes, you are. You *are* obeying a principle. In the case of the Nazis, to disobey orders would also be disobeying religious laws, since the SS really believed—a lot of them did at least—that Hitler was their God-given leader, their messiah. And one more thing. Back in the Second World War, our men were killing their men; they were killing ours, just because those guys were told to do it, and they were doing it on a bigger scale, that's no worse than what our men did. Isn't it the same thing? They were told to do it or they'd be court-martialed."

Stinson looked incredulous, "Are you equating a soldier fighting in war with a guard exterminating innocent people?

"Well, it's still soldier versus soldier." Chris's comment evoked a round of applause. Students' excitement, or at least the excitement on the faces of Chris, Donnie, and Dave, clashed with Stinson's ashen expression.

"Even if a guy wipes out 40 thousand people over a four-year period," Chris continued, "and if he didn't do it he would have gotten court-martialed, and if one of our guys didn't shoot one of their guys or went AWOL or whatever, he would have gotten court-martialed."

"So what you're saying, Chris, is that an SS guard who exterminates people is justified because he was doing what everybody else in the Second World War was doing? Following orders?"

Chris seemed to back down, or at least to regroup. "Well, let's talk about Vietnam. In World War II, at least, you were fighting an army. But in Vietnam, hey, it was different, the enemy was all over, hiding in bushes, the enemy was *everywhere*."

Vietnam. At least the word was finally spoken. Throughout this discussion, Stinson's mind had raced to My Lai, particularly to a image fixed in his memory of an hysterical teenage girl on the cover of *Life*. Stinson knew also that Vietnam was very much on the minds of Chris and Donnie, both of whom had fathers wounded in Vietnam. He hesitated for a moment but decided to pursue an example that had occurred to him earlier. It was risky, but he needed some way to jar these kids out of their moral complacency.

"Okay. Let's say that you're with a squad in Vietnam, and you guys come into a village and this village has been giving you guys a lot of problems, a lot of sniping, and the lieutenant in charge of the squad is pissed off and upset." Stinson's language set off another flurry of "oohs" and "ahs." But for the first time in awhile, the room fell absolutely silent.

"And so he orders you," Stinson continued, "to bring out all the villagers, and there are women, children, and old men; a lot of the older boys and men are not there, and he says to you, 'Hey I'm sick and tired of this damn village, we're going to take care of it right now. Round them up and shoot them, we are just going to wipe them out; they are not going to give us any problems anymore.'" Stinson paused. Deliberately, methodically, he turned to face his students. As if speaking directly to every one of them, he asked, "Would *you* do it?"

No one said a word. Some fidgeted nervously, folding pieces of paper into tiny triangles or tapping their pencils on their desk. Maybe he was finally getting through. He decided to take it one step further.

Without breaking role, he glared at Chris, Donnie, and Dave. "I'm telling you right now," his voice booming, "take 'em out and shoot 'em.' What would you do," he pressed, "would you say *yes* or *no*?"

The boys were silent, averting their eyes from Stinson's. It was Cindy who spoke, Cindy who had been the lone voice of morality earlier in the hour. "Listen," she began, her voice sounding sympathetic and apologetic. "When you make a commitment to do something, you're going to do things you don't like."

Alex, who had said nothing during the period, muttered loud enough for all to hear, "How do you know you *don't* like it?"

Stinson's head was spinning. Alex's bravado, the desire of a 16-year-old to shock his peers, he could understand, but Cindy? If she felt this way, what did the others think? There were less than five minutes left in the period when Stinson slumped down in a chair in front of his desk, pausing for what seemed an interminable period. Finally, somberly, he faced the class.

"I will try not to inject my own personal feelings into this. But I am really disturbed by what I'm hearing here. This incident occurred in 1968 at My Lai and the person involved, William Calley, the person who pulled the trigger, and his commanding officer, Captain Medina, were court-martialed, not for not doing it, but *for* doing it. The army itself found this to be an unconscionable action. Why do you think so?" Stinson asked, his question as much an accusation as a query. "The army itself said that this is not what Americans do; even though an order was given, this was beyond the pale, a violation against humanity."

Stinson's timing was impeccable. The clock began to hum as it did right before the bell was about to ring. There was a minute left to go and this comment seemed to bring this difficult discussion to a close. But Donnie wouldn't have it. His quivering voice conveyed a mixture of anger and passion.

"Mr. S., it's like the Revolutionary War; a farmer picks up a gun and shoots and then goes back to the field, same thing. People in Vietnam, you could never tell who your friend was, you didn't know—your buddy could be a Viet Cong soldier, you just didn't know."

Donnie spoke from his heart, obviously drawing on the experience of his dad, who lost a limb to a land mine near Da Nang.

Stinson felt for Donnie but could not tolerate the implications of his comment. "So what do you do, Donnie? Are you saying that we must shoot first and ask questions later?"

"That's right," said Dave, coming to his friend's defense. "You never knew who was right; they shot at us; people make a lot of bad judgments."

Chris joined in. "You *have* to take actions like that. Because the only way you win a war like that is to exterminate the whole population."

Stinson was flustered. He sat at his desk, cradling his head between his two muscular arms. "There are some really disturbing implications in what you just said, Chris. That the only way to win is to wipe out everybody. I ask you," Stinson appealed, "What kind of victory is that?

Chris responded without flinching, "A *complete* victory!"

Students' laughter, raucous and nervous, almost drowned out the sound of the bell, signaling the end of the period.

Immediate and Long-Term Teaching Options

Section 1: Choices in the Heat of Discussion

Teaching revolves around choices made in the heat of the moment. During this 50-minute class, Richard Stinson made dozens of choices that related directly to the kind of discussion that took place. But the choices Stinson made were not the only ones he could have made. As you consider the following scenarios, each describing a course of action different from the one pursued by Stinson, think about these questions: If Stinson had done this, what would have been different for him as a teacher? How would each of these decisions have lead to a different experience for Chris, Donnie, Cindy, and the other students in this class? What are the implications of each of these decisions? What does each say about the purposes of schooling or the purpose of high-school history classes?

Scenario #1

Background: After 17 years of teaching, Richard Stinson has developed a particular kind of classroom style. Rather than telling students what to think, he tries hard to make *them* do the thinking. One strategy he uses is to question students frequently to help *them* construct knowledge and come to conclusions on their own. This strategy, however, is more risky and less predictable than other pedagogical approaches. In fact, the discussion you

have read about first begins to get heated when Stinson asks the class this question, "Is there any authority that transcends the Constitution? What about moral or religious authority?" Imagine that instead of asking these questions, Stinson had taken a different approach:

> Donnie asks, "Let's say that you were the equivalent of the Supreme Court or say the Constitution, and then there was somebody, like the principal, watching over us, taking notes. Would that be a higher form of government?"
>
> Stinson thought for a moment. The hour was passing quickly and he still had a lot of ground to cover. Donnie's question was a good one, and he could use it to introduce students to the idea of moral authority, the notion that the framers of the Constitution believed that the United States was "one nation under God," even placing the phrase "In God we trust" on our currency. This was an important idea for students to understand, but to develop it fully would require more time than he had available. Therefore, he responded in this way:
>
> > That is a very good question, Donnie. Yes, I would say that this would be a higher form of government in the same way as the founders of this country viewed God and religious authority as higher than the laws enacted by human beings. In fact, there has been a long-standing debate in our country about "natural law," or law that rises above those legislated by men and women. So, yes, Donnie, your question is very appropriate. One of the things we will study in the weeks to come is how the framers of the Constitution viewed their task and how they saw themselves as being consistent with a higher authority. It is very much a part of the Constitutional debate and you can look forward to reading about it.

Scenario #2

Background: Near the end of the hour, in an attempt to get students to think harder about their assumptions, Stinson takes on the role of a staff sergeant who orders his troops to massacre

all of the people in a village during the Vietnam war. That strategy seems to backfire, especially when Cindy says that one does things in war that are regrettable but necessary. Imagine that the role play had taken on these dimensions: In addition to asking students to play the role of U.S. military personnel, Stinson also asked other students to play the role of children and to act out the scene in the front of the class. How might such an activity have been perceived by this class?

Scenario #3

Background: When confronted by the question of his own religious beliefs, Stinson carefully avoided the topic. Actually, he is a firm Christian, the son of a minister who was involved in Christian youth movements prior to entering teaching. In reflecting on this class later in the day, Stinson wondered whether one can have a serious discussion about morality without invoking God. Imagine that in response to Donnie's final comment, Stinson said this:

> It may be a "complete victory" in the eyes of men, but it is pathetic response, the epitome of sin, in the eyes of God. I'm sorry, Donnie, but I can no longer restrain myself. You see, I believe that we will be held accountable for our actions on a day of judgment. On that day, we will not be evaluated by whether we obeyed the will of our staff sergeant but whether we obeyed the will of the Divine. In the final result, I believe, we answer to God, not man. And believe it or not, this principle was a motivating force behind the Constitution that we will study this year.

Questions

- Should a public school teacher disclose religious beliefs like this?
- If Stinson is right about the futility of a "godless" discussion of morality, what is a teacher to do?

- Are moral questions best left out of the history/social studies classroom?

- Is it fair to disclose one's personal religious beliefs in a classroom where there are students who come from diverse religious backgrounds?

- Imagine that Stinson had pursued this course of action. How would he respond to an angry parent who accused him of "promoting a particular religious view in the public school classroom"?

Section 2: Possibilities for Follow Up

Every teacher experiences classes that go in directions he or she did not anticipate. In the heat of instruction it is often difficult to second-guess one's own judgment, but once class is over, good teachers often modify their plans based on new information they have learned about their students. The bell ended this particular discussion, but Richard Stinson had the choice of letting the issue rest or bringing it up again. Consider the merits of each of the following course of action.

Possibility #1

Background: It is often said that sometimes adolescents need limits more than anything else. One interpretation of Tuesday's class is of a group of adolescents testing the limits of acceptability, trying their hardest to look and talk tough. Based on this assessment, Stinson formulated the following response:

As Stinson walked into class that Wednesday morning, he addressed his class:

> I've been thinking a lot about our discussion yesterday and I want to skip current events today and go right into what I want to say to you. I understand that you have many different feelings

about Vietnam and what happened there. Some of your fathers served in Vietnam, and I know in your case, Donnie, your dad has to deal with a wound he suffered there. But the attitudes you and your classmates expressed yesterday—that the only way to have "won" the war was to exterminate the entire population, military and civilian—are abhorrent to me. Such attitudes may be acceptable among Nazis, but in a civilized democracy such as ours, they are not, and I will have none of it in here. These attitudes are the opposite of what we are trying to teach in social studies. I repeat: I will have none of it here. I will not tolerate these things being said in class again.

Possibility #2

Background: After class, Stinson thought hard about what had transpired. He could not fathom Donnie's response. What could motivate such beliefs? He decided that his role as a social studies teacher was to expose his students to many different views. Therefore, he made the decision to call Donnie's father and ask him to come to speak to his history class about his experiences in Vietnam. Imagine that Donnie's father said the following during his talk to the class:

> Why did I lose my leg in Vietnam? I'll tell you why: Because we were double-crossed by our "friends." We were told to fight a war but to fight it with one hand tied behind our backs. I'll tell you this, no matter what your history books tell you, we could have won that war if we had been allowed to fight it the way we knew how. Did civilians get killed in Vietnam? Of course they did. You show me one war in the history of mankind where civilians did not get killed. I'm sorry, but that is the nature of war. If we weren't prepared for that to happen we should have never entered into it in the first place. Once we did, we made a mistake by imposing the constraints on our troops that we did. A lot of our best and brightest came home in body bags

because some bureaucrat in D.C. thought he knew what is right. A lot of kids your age are walking around with crippled dads because so-called Americans were supporting the enemy and burning the American flag while we risked our lives.

Questions

- Is the role of the history or social studies teacher to expose students to as many points of view as possible, while keeping his or her views in the background?
- Would having a speaker who enunciated beliefs such as these be an educational experience for students?
- If Stinson had a speaker come to class who expressed the above views, should he find a veteran who opposed the war and have that person also come to speak?
- What about teaching students about the Critical Period? If so much time is devoted to this topic, aren't students being cheated with respect to the material they are supposed to cover in a survey course on U.S. history?

Possibility #3

Background: As Richard Stinson thought about things his students said—the notion that killing children is justified because you were ordered to do it—his mind flashed to the My Lai massacre and the first article he read about it. After class he went to his files to retrieve the article called "The Massacre at My Lai." The *Life* magazine article featured eyewitness accounts and photographs of the American soldiers killing women and children in the village of My Lai in Vietnam. Mr. Stinson read again the introduction: "The South Vietnamese government . . . people were simply gunned down." (*Life* magazine, Dec. 5, 1969, 36–45). He would have students read the article in class tomorrow, talk about Calley's trial on Thursday, and have students write an essay on Calley's plea and the verdict of the military court for Friday. The "Critical Period" was important, he felt, but these were pressing issues that had to be dealt with now, while stu-

dents' interest was high. He would resume his normal lesson plans on Monday.

Questions

- Would this be an appropriate assignment for 11th graders?
- Could having students read this article be considered as a form of indoctrination?
- Is Stinson right in devoting this much time to the issue? If he wanted students to learn about My Lai, what would be the advantages of waiting until the spring when they came to it in their textbook?
- Imagine that as a follow-up activity, Stinson invited a Vietnamese refugee to come to class and speak about American atrocities that he or she witnessed. Would this be appropriate?

Section 3: Additional Questions and Issues

1. People's opinions about the Vietnam War differ widely. Should teachers avoid controversial topics because they might drive a wedge between school and home? Is neutrality in the face of controversy the best course? The most moral?

2. Donnie, Chris, and Dave approached Mr. Stinson in the beginning of the year about using his room for the War Games Club. Each Tuesday for 45 minutes after school, these students play board games that re-enact major battles in military history. One of Stinson's colleagues claimed that, by providing the room to students, he is breeding a group of "neo-Nazis". At the time, Stinson dismissed the comment as hyperbole, but after this class session he thought about it again. Is Stinson promoting aggressive, amoral attitudes by allowing students to use his room for the War Games Club? Should he discontinue the practice? Why? Why not?

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